

REMARKS

In the Office Action,¹ claims 1, 4, 14, and 18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,259,406 to Sugiura et al. ("Sugiura"); and claims 2, 5-7, 13, and 15 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sugiura. Claims 3, 8-12, 16, and 17 were objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants appreciate the Examiner's indication of allowable subject matter in claims 3, 8, 9-12, 16, and 17.

I. Summary of Amendments

By this amendment, claims 3, 8-11, 16, and 17 have been amended, and claims 1, 2, 4-7, 12-15, and 18 have been canceled, without prejudice or disclaimer. Claims 3, 11, 16, and 17 have been rewritten in independent form. The subject matter of claim 12 has been incorporated into amended claim 11. Claims 8 and 10 have been amended to correct their dependencies; claims 3, 8, 10, 11, 16, and 17 have been amended to improve form and grammar; and claims 3, 8, 9, 11, 16, and 17 have been amended to more appropriately define Applicants' invention. The amendments made to improve form and grammar and to more appropriately define Applicants' invention do not change the scope of the claims. Claims 3, 8-11, 16, and 17 are currently pending. Of these, claims 3, 11, 16, and 17 are independent.

¹ The Office Action contains statements reflecting characterizations of the related art and the claims. Regardless of whether any such statement is identified herein, Applicants decline to automatically subscribe to any statement or characterization in the Office Action.

II. Claim Rejections

Applicants traverse the Examiner's rejections under 35 U.S.C. §§ 102(b) and 103(a). However, to advance prosecution and as explained below, Applicants have amended claims to place the application in condition for allowance.

The Examiner indicated that claims 3, 8, 9-12, 16, and 17 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form. By this amendment, Applicants have rewritten claims 3, 11, 16, and 17 in independent form by incorporating the elements of their respective base claims and any intervening claims. In particular, the elements of independent claim 1 have been incorporated into objected to claims 3 and 11; the elements of now canceled and objected to claim 12 have been incorporated into objected to claim 11; the elements of now canceled independent claim 14 and now canceled intervening claim 15 have been incorporated into objected to claim 16; and the elements of now canceled independent claim 14 have been incorporated into objected to claim 17. Applicants additionally note that claims 3, 11, 16, and 17 have further been amended to improve form and grammar and to more appropriately define Applicants' invention without changing the scope of the claims. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 3, 11, 16, and 17 are in condition for allowance, and timely notice to that effect is respectfully requested.

In addition, claims 8-10 depend, directly or indirectly, from independent claim 3. Therefore, Applicants respectfully submit that claims 8-10 are allowable for at least the reason that they depend, directly or indirectly, from an allowable claim. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that claims 8-10 be allowed along with claim 3.

Conclusion

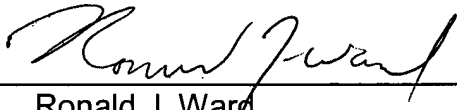
Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of this application, withdrawal of the rejections, and the timely allowance of pending claims 3, 8-11, 16, and 17.

If there is any fee due in connection with the filing of this response, please charge the fee to our Deposit Account No. 06-0916.

Respectfully submitted,

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